

# CITY OF RENTON RULES FOR RESIDENTIAL BUILDING HEIGHT

## Planning Division

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Phone: 425-430-7200 | [www.rentonwa.gov](http://www.rentonwa.gov)

This handout addresses the most commonly asked questions and provides general information about the allowed height of residential buildings (buildings located in the RC, R-1, R-4, R-6, R-8, R-10, R-14, and RMF zones). Please refer to Renton Municipal Code (RMC) for more information, specifically Section 4-2-110 for development regulations and Chapter 4-11 RMC for definitions.

## How is *residential* building height measured in the City of Renton?

Height is measured from the grade plane (i.e., average grade) to the wall plates, and then from the wall plates to the top of the building or other attached structures (e.g., a rooftop deck).

## What is a wall plate?

A wall plate is a horizontal member (e.g., lumbar, brace, etc.), built into or laid along the top of a wall, that distributes and supports the pressure from joists, rafters, etc.

## How is a grade plane determined?

The grade plane is the average of multiple **finished grade** (after construction) ground elevations. Depending on site characteristics there are three ways to determine grade plane:

**If the ground level within 6' of exterior walls is generally level (only slopes slightly to provide drainage):**

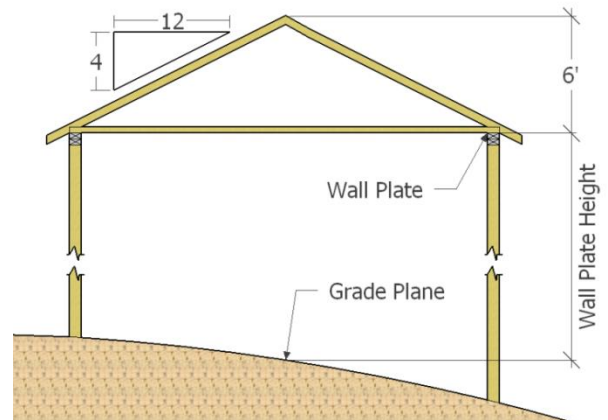
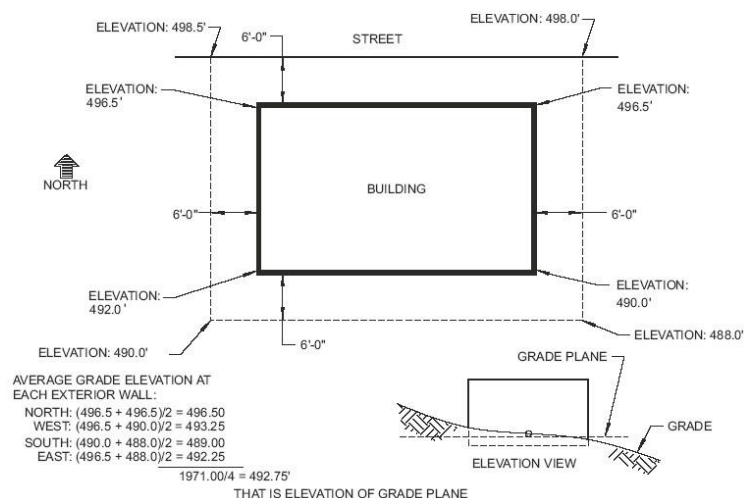
1. The grade plane is the averaged elevations at the corners of the building.

**If the ground slopes away from exterior walls, and the lot line(s) are *MORE THAN 6' AWAY*:**

2. The grade plane is the averaged elevations of the lowest points located 6' away from the exterior walls.

**If the ground slopes away from exterior walls, and the lot line(s) are *LESS THAN 6' AWAY*:**

3. The grade plane is the averaged elevations of the lowest points between the exterior walls and lot lines.



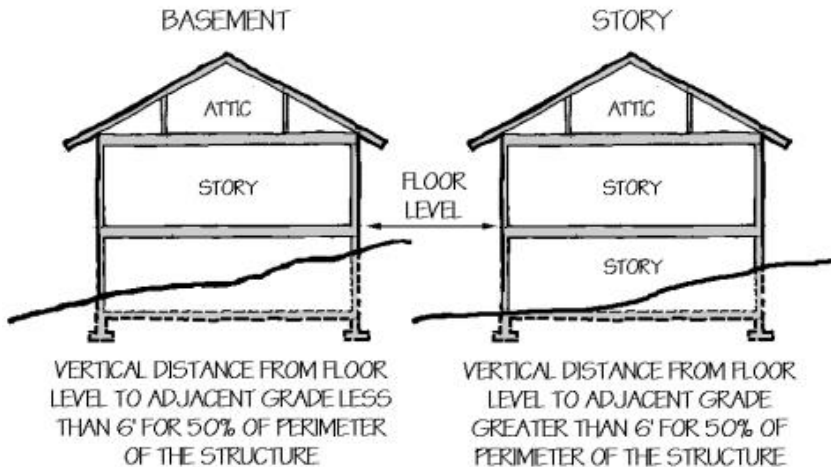
*Where the slope is inconsistent or retaining walls are utilized, or where the building footprint is complex, the determination of grade plane can be more complicated. In such cases, a more exacting method for calculating the grade plane must be utilized.*

## Is there a limit to the number of stories?

Yes, the number of allowed stories depends on the zone. The definition of a “story” may qualify the first level of a house to be a *basement* instead of a *story*.

**The first floor may qualify as a *basement* if the finished floor directly above is:**

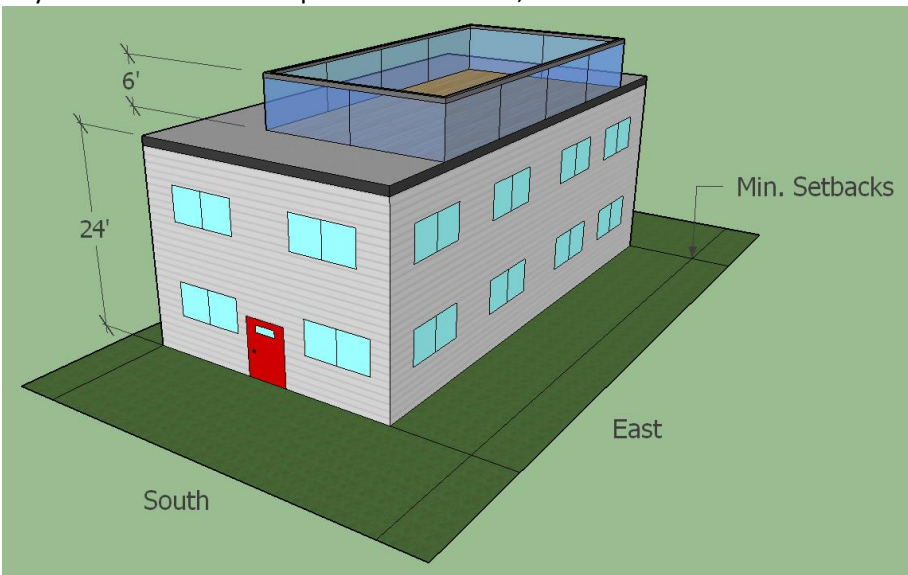
1. No more than 6’ above grade for at least 50% of the building’s perimeter; and
2. No more than 12’ above grade at any point.



## How high can my roof extend from my wall plates?

Roofs that are pitched at a slope of 4:12 or greater may extend up to 6’ above the *maximum* wall plate height. If the wall plates are lower than the maximum height allowed, the roof may project higher to compensate for the difference. For example, if the maximum wall plate height is 24’ yet the wall plates of a house are no higher than 20’ from the grade plane, the roof may extend up to 10’ from the wall plates ( $24' - 20' = 4'$ ;  $4' + 6' = 10'$  roof height).

Roofs pitched less than 4:12 may only extend above the maximum wall plate height if the roof is “stepped back” 1.5’ from each minimum building setback line for each 1’ above the maximum wall plate height. This exception also applies to features such as decks. In the illustration below, the deck extends 6’ from the maximum wall plate height and is stepped back 9’ ( $1.5' \times 6' = 9'$ ) from each minimum building setback line. The east side of the building is setback 9’ beyond the minimum required setback line, which allows that side of the deck to be flush with the façade.

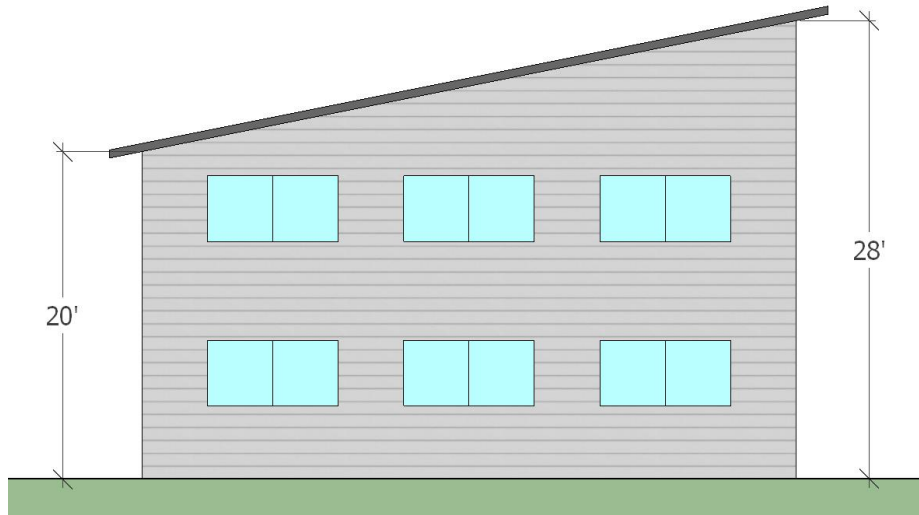


*Common rooftop features, such as chimneys, may project an additional four (4) vertical feet from a roof surface.*

## Are there exceptions?

Yes, there are two exceptions:

1. If a shed roof is the primary roof surface, wall plates may be higher than the maximum allowed as long as the average height of wall plates is equal or less than the maximum allowed. In the example below of a house located in a zone with a maximum wall plate height of 24', the wall plates supporting the high side of the roof are 28' above the grade plane, and the lower wall plates are only 20' above grade plane, which results in an average wall plate height of 24'.



2. If a roof surface only covers a modulated portion of a façade, the wall plates supporting that roof surface may extend above the maximum allowed but must not extend above the ridgeline of the primary roof. Such qualifying façade modulations are limited to be no wider than ten feet (10') or twenty-five percent (25%) of the building elevation, whichever is greater.



CITY OF RENTON, WASHINGTON

ORDINANCE NO. 5790

**AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF RENTON, WASHINGTON, AMENDING SECTIONS 4-2-060, 4-2-080, 4-2-110 AND 4-2-115 OF CHAPTER 2, ZONING DISTRICTS – USES AND STANDARDS, SECTION 4-9-250 OF CHAPTER 9, PERMITS – SPECIFIC, AND SECTIONS 4-11-020 AND 4-11-230 OF CHAPTER 11, DEFINITIONS, OF TITLE IV (DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS) OF THE RENTON MUNICIPAL CODE, BY AMENDING RESIDENTIAL BUILDING HEIGHT REGULATIONS, AMENDING THE DEFINITION OF “BUILDING HEIGHT” AND ADDING DEFINITIONS FOR “WALL PLATE” AND “WALL PLATE HEIGHT.”**

**WHEREAS**, the City recognizes that the current method of regulating the height of residential buildings is unsatisfactory; and

**WHEREAS**, this matter was referred to and considered by the Planning Commission, and the text amendment request being in conformity with the City’s Comprehensive Plan, as amended; and

**WHEREAS**, the Planning Commission held a public hearing on January 6, 2016, and considered all relevant matters, and all parties were heard appearing in support or in opposition;

**NOW, THEREFORE**, THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF RENTON, WASHINGTON, DOES ORDAIN AS FOLLOWS:

**SECTION I.** The “Utilities, small”, “Utilities, medium” and “Utilities, large” rows in subsection 4-2-060.O, Utilities, of Chapter 2, Zoning Districts – Uses and Standards, of Title IV (Development Regulations) of the Renton Municipal Code, is hereby amended as shown on Attachment A. The remainder of the subsection shall stay as currently codified.

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**SECTION II.** Subsection 4-2-080.A.5 of 4-2-080.A, Subject to the Following Conditions, of Chapter 2, Zoning Districts – Uses and Standards, of Title IV (Development Regulations) of the Renton Municipal Code, is hereby amended as follows:

5. ~~Reserved~~ Above-ground public utility facilities, such as water towers, reservoirs, water treatment facilities, and pump stations shall be treated with public art, subject to approval by the Arts Commission.

**SECTION III.** Subsection 4-2-110.A, Development Standards for Residential Zoning Designations (Primary and Attached Accessory Structures), of Chapter 2, Zoning Districts – Uses and Standards, of Title IV (Development Regulations) of the Renton Municipal Code, is hereby amended by deleting the “Maximum Height” row, and adding two new rows, “Maximum Number of Stories” and “Maximum Wall Plate Height”, as shown below. The remainder of the subsection shall stay as currently codified.

	RC	R-1	R-4	R-6	R-8	R-10	R-14	RMF
<b>Maximum Height</b> <sup>8,9</sup>	<del>30 ft.</del>						Residential: <del>30 ft.</del> Commercial: <del>20 ft.</del>	<del>35 ft.</del> <sup>20</sup>
<b>Maximum Number of Stories</b>	<u>3</u>			<u>2</u>			<u>3</u>	
<b>Maximum Wall Plate Height</b> <sup>8, 9, 18, 19</sup>	<u>32 ft.</u>			<u>24 ft.</u>				<u>32 ft.</u> <sup>20</sup>

**SECTION IV.** The “Maximum Building Height” subsection of 4-2-110.B, Development Standards for Residential Development (Detached Accessory Buildings), of Chapter 2, Zoning

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Districts – Uses and Standards, of Title IV (Development Regulations) of the Renton Municipal Code, is hereby amended as shown below. The remainder of the subsection shall stay as currently codified.

RC	Accessory building – <u>1215</u> ft.
R-1, R-4, R-6, and R-8	Accessory building – <u>1215</u> ft. Accessory dwelling units <u>and Animal husbandry or agricultural related structures are subject to the maximum wall plate height of RMC 4-2-110.A, and associated conditions. 30 ft., except that</u> Additionally, the <del>accessory unit structure (dwelling space, garage space, etc.)</del> shall not be taller than the primary dwelling. <del>Animal husbandry or agricultural related structures – 30 ft.</del>
R-10 and R-14	Accessory building – <u>1215</u> ft. Accessory dwelling unit <u>and agricultural related structures are– subject to the maximum wall plate height of RMC 4-2-110.A, and associated conditions, except that the structure shall not be taller than the</u> <u>primary dwelling. 30 ft.</u>
RMF	25 ft. <sup>20</sup> , <u>except that the structure shall not be taller than the primary building(s).</u>
Maximum Height for Public Facilities <u>shall be determined through site plan review. –see RMC 4-2-110.D.9.</u>	
<b>Maximum Height for Wireless Communication Facilities (Including Amateur Radio Antennas)</b>	
RC, R-1, R-4, R-6, R-8, R-10, R-14, and RMF	See RMC 4-4-140, Wireless Communication Facilities. Freestanding vertical monopole amateur radio antennas are allowed a maximum height of 45 ft. without a Conditional Use Permit. Taller structures will have maximum height determined pursuant to RMC 4-9-030, Conditional Use Permits.

**SECTION V.** Subsection 4-2-110.D.9 of 4-2-110.D, Conditions Associated with Development Standards Table for Residential Zoning Designations, of Chapter 2, Zoning Designations – Uses and Standards, of Title IV (Development Regulations) of the Renton Municipal Code, is hereby amended as follows:

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9. The allowed height of p~~Public facilities are allowed the following height bonus: shall be determined through Site Plan Review.~~

a. ~~Water towers/reservoirs are permitted up to a maximum height of one hundred seventy five feet (175') to the highest point of the reservoir.~~

b. ~~Water treatment facilities and pump stations are allowed up to fifty feet (50') subject to site plan development review. The setback standards may be modified to increase setbacks as part of the site plan development review approval.~~

c. ~~Public utility facilities exceeding fifty feet (50') in height shall be treated with public art consistent with RMC 4-9-160. Such public art shall be eligible for one percent (1%) for art funding and shall be reviewed by the Renton Municipal Arts Commission.~~

d. ~~Public facilities are permitted an additional fifteen feet (15') in height above that otherwise permitted in the zone if "pitched roofs," as defined herein, are used for at least sixty percent (60%) or more of the roof surface of both primary and accessory structures. In addition, the height of a publicly owned structure may be increased as follows:~~

i. ~~When abutting a public street, one additional foot of height for each additional one and one half feet (1 1/2') of perimeter building setback beyond the minimum street setback is required; or~~

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~~ii. When abutting a common property line, one additional foot (1') of height for each additional two feet (2') of perimeter building setback beyond the minimum is required along a common property line.~~

**SECTION VI.** Subsection 4-2-110.D.12 of 4-2-110.D, Conditions Associated with Development Standards Table for Residential Zoning Designations, of Chapter 2, Zoning Designations – Uses and Standards, of Title IV (Development Regulations) of the Renton Municipal Code, is hereby amended as follows:

~~12. Reserved.~~ **Roofs of Modulated Façades:** Wall plates of a modulated portion of a building may exceed the maximum wall plate height if the roof surface does not exceed the ridgeline of the primary roof surface. Such façade modulations shall be no wider than ten feet (10') or twenty-five percent (25%) of the building elevation, whichever is greater.

**SECTION VII.** Subsection 4-2-110.D.18 of 4-2-110.D, Conditions Associated with Development Standards Table for Residential Zoning Designations, of Chapter 2, Zoning Designations – Uses and Standards, of Title IV (Development Regulations) of the Renton Municipal Code, is hereby amended as follows:

~~18. Reserved.~~ **Vertical Projections from Wall Plates:**

~~a. Roofs with a pitch equal to or greater than 4:12 may project an additional six (6) vertical feet from the maximum wall plate height. If the height of wall plates on a building are less than the stated maximum the roof may project higher to account for the difference, yet the combined height of both features shall not exceed the combined maximums (e.g., if the maximum wall~~



plate height of a zone is twenty-four feet (24') and the wall plates of a structure are no taller than twenty feet (20'), the roof may project up to ten feet (10') instead of six feet (6')). Common rooftop features, such as chimneys, may project an additional four (4) vertical feet from a roof surface.

b. Non-exempt vertical projections (e.g., roofs pitched less than 4:12, decks, railings, etc.) may extend up to six (6) vertical feet above the maximum wall plate height if the projection is stepped back one-and-a-half (1.5) horizontal feet from each minimum building setback line for each one (1) vertical foot above the maximum wall plate height.

**SECTION VIII.** Subsection 4-2-110.D.19 of 4-2-110.D, Conditions Associated with Development Standards Table for Residential Zoning Designations, of Chapter 2, Zoning Designations – Uses and Standards, of Title IV (Development Regulations) of the Renton Municipal Code, is hereby amended as follows:

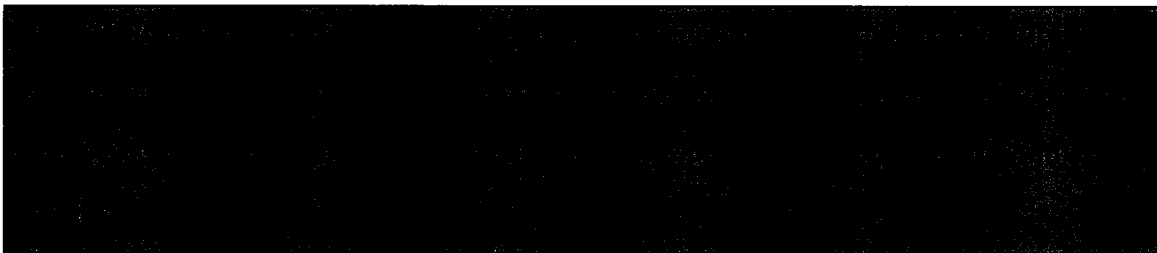
19. ~~Reserved.~~ **Shed Roofs:** Wall plates supporting a primary roof surface that has only one (1) sloping plane (e.g., shed roof) may exceed the stated maximum if the average of wall plate heights is equal to or less than the maximum wall plate height allowed.

**SECTION IX.** Subsection 4-2-110.D.20 of 4-2-110.D, Conditions Associated with Development Standards Table for Residential Zoning Designations, of Chapter 2, Zoning Designations – Uses and Standards, of Title IV (Development Regulations) of the Renton Municipal Code, is hereby amended as follows:

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20. An additional ten feet (10') of maximum wall plate height and an additional story for a residential dwelling structure may be obtained through the provision of additional amenities such as ~~as-pitched roofs~~, additional recreation facilities, underground parking, and additional landscaped open space areas; as determined through the site development plan review process and depending on the compatibility of the proposed buildings with adjacent or abutting existing residential development. ~~In no case shall t~~The maximum wall plate height of a residential structure shall not exceed forty-five ~~forty-five~~ forty-two feet (45'~~45'~~42').

**SECTION X.** The "Roofs" subsection of 4-2-115.E.3, Residential Design, of Chapter 2, Zoning Designations – Uses and Standards, of Title IV (Development Regulations) of the Renton Municipal Code, is hereby amended as shown below. The remainder of the subsection shall stay as currently codified.

	
<b>Guidelines:</b> Roofs shall represent a variety of forms and profiles that add character and relief to the landscape of the neighborhood. The use of bright colors, as well as roofing that is made of material like gravel and/or a reflective material, is discouraged.	
<b>Standards:</b>	
RC and R-1	n/a
R-4, R-6, and R-8	One of the following is required for all development:  1. Hip or gabled with at least a <del>six-four</del> to twelve ( <del>64</del> :12) pitch for the prominent

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	<p>form of the roof (dormers, etc., may have lesser pitch), or</p> <p>2. Shed roof.</p> <p>Additionally, for subdivisions greater than nine (9) lots: A variety of roof forms appropriate to the style of the home shall be used.</p>
R-10 and R-14	<p>Both of the following are required:</p> <p>1. Primary roof pitch shall be a minimum <del>six</del> <u>four</u> to twelve (<del>64</del>:12). If a gable roof is used, exit access from a third floor must face a public right-of-way for emergency access, and</p> <p>2. A variety of roofing colors shall be used within the development and all roof material shall be fire retardant.</p>

**SECTION XI.** Subsection 4-9-250.B.1.a, Residential Land Uses, of Chapter 9, Permits – Specific, of Title IV (Development Regulations) of the Renton Municipal Code, is hereby amended as follows:

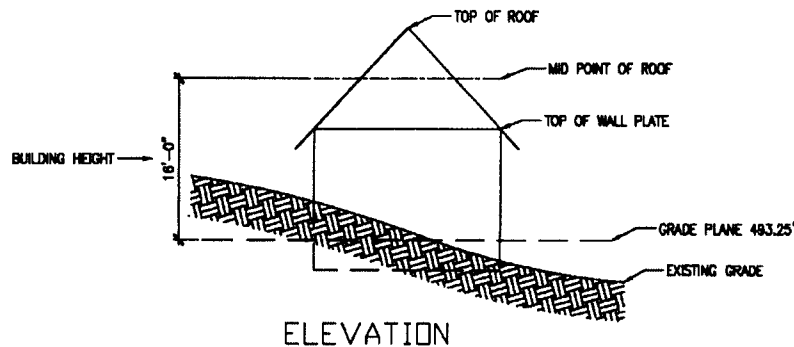
**a. Residential Land Uses:** Lot width, lot depth, setbacks, allowed projections into setbacks, building height, and lot coverage. Lot width, lot depth, and setback variations do not require a variance if the request is part of a stream daylighting proposal and meets criteria in RMC 4-3-050.L; and

**SECTION XII.** The definition of "Building Height" in section 4-11-020, Definitions B, of Chapter 11, Definitions, of Title IV (Development Regulations) of the Renton Municipal Code, is hereby amended as follows:

**BUILDING HEIGHT:** The measurement of building height depends on the applicable zone, as follows:

**1. Within the RC, R-1, R-4, R-6, R-8, R-10, R-14, and RMF Zones:** The vertical distance from grade plane to the highest wall plate combined with the height of any portion of the structure that extends above the wall plate (e.g., roof, deck, etc.), excluding chimneys, ventilation stacks, and similar elements as determined by the Administrator.

**2. All Other Zones:** The vertical distance from grade plane to the average height of the highest roof surface.



## DETERMINATION OF BUILDING HEIGHT

**SECTION XIII.** Section 4-11-230, Definitions W, of Chapter 11, Definitions, of Title IV (Development Regulations) of the Renton Municipal Code, is hereby amended to add definitions of "Wall Plate" and "Wall Plate Height", in alphabetical order, to read as follows:

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**WALL PLATE:** A horizontal member built into or laid along the top of a wall to support and distribute the pressure from joists, rafters, etc.

**WALL PLATE HEIGHT:** The vertical distance from the grade plane of a site to the top of one (1) or more wall plates of a building located thereon.

**SECTION XIV.** This ordinance shall be effective upon its passage, approval, and five (5) days after publication.


PASSED BY THE CITY COUNCIL this 25<sup>th</sup> day of April, 2016.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Jason A. Seth, City Clerk

APPROVED BY THE MAYOR this 25<sup>th</sup> day of April, 2016.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Denis Law, Mayor

Approved as to form:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Lawrence J. Warren, City Attorney

Date of Publication: 4/29/2016 (summary)

ORD:1903:4/5/16:scr



## ATTACHMENT A

4-2-060 ZONING USE TABLE -- USES ALLOWED IN ZONING DESIGNATIONS:

USES:	RESIDENTIAL ZONING DESIGNATIONS								INDUSTRIAL			COMMERCIAL ZONING DESIGNATIONS							
	RC	R-1	R-4	R-6	R-8	RMH	R-10	R-14	RMF	IL	IM	IH	CN	CV	CA	CD	CO	COR	UC
Communication broadcast and relay towers	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H29	H29	H29	H	H	H	H	H	H	
Electrical power generation and cogeneration									H	H66	H66	H66	H66	H66	H66	H66	H66	H66	
Utilities, small	P <sub>5</sub>	P <sub>5</sub>	P <sub>5</sub>	P <sub>5</sub>	P <sub>5</sub>	P <sub>5</sub>	P <sub>5</sub>	P <sub>5</sub>	P <sub>5</sub>	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Utilities, medium	AD <sub>5</sub>	AD <sub>5</sub>	AD <sub>5</sub>	AD <sub>5</sub>	AD <sub>5</sub>	AD <sub>5</sub>	AD <sub>5</sub>	AD <sub>5</sub>	AD <sub>5</sub>	AD	AD	AD	AD	AD	AD	AD	AD	AD	AD
Utilities, large	H <sub>5</sub>	H <sub>5</sub>	H <sub>5</sub>	H <sub>5</sub>	H <sub>5</sub>	H <sub>5</sub>	H <sub>5</sub>	H <sub>5</sub>	H <sub>5</sub>	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H